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A
LETTER

TO

FRANCIS JEFFREY, Esq.

EDITOR OF THE EDINBURGH REVIEW.

BY

AN ANTI-REFORMIST.

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"QUO TENEAM NODO MUTANTEM PROTEA VULTUS?"

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LETTER, &c.

SIR,

AS Editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, you are responsible to the Public for what is contained in it. To you, therefore, I address the following Strictures on the tone which the principles of that Journal have assumed in several of the last numbers. I am aware, indeed, that some of the papers to which I shall allude may not have been written by yourself; but they have been published with your sanction, and I am entitled to consider them as your own.

No periodical publication ever, perhaps, obtained a more extensive sale, or an higher reputation. Indeed, the fluency, and even elegance of diction, the varied and deep research, and, above all, the ingenuity and acuteness with which you and the other writers have conducted it, rendered it justly

the first literary journal of the age. In the present state of affairs, when politics form the subject of general conversation, and so much engross the attention of the other Reviewers, it was not to have been expected that you, sir, whose sentiments were so well known, should have excluded from your articles so alluring and inviting a topic. Accordingly we find, that, from the commencement of your work, you have taken a very active and violent part in the discussion of the political questions of the day. I do not blame you for this conduct, but I must complain of the intemperance and party-spirit which you have all along manifested. Great as is the circulation of your Journal, it has not, as you * appear to flatter yourself, any important influence, I hope, on the public mind. On the contrary, the coarse censure which you have bestowed on most eminent characters, the bold unconstitutional language which you have held in various articles, and your late conversion to the "*damnable heresy of reform*," in its most dangerous

* See N^o. 31. p. 212.

shape, must have disgusted every sensible and impartial man. Still, I do not think it right to allow principles, so false and pernicious as those which you have lately adopted, to be widely dispersed without animadversion.

It was long, sir, a matter of surprise, that *you* should have stood forward as a determined and loud enemy of reform. But while such was your conduct, while you exposed the hazardous consequences of innovation in any shape whatever ; and shewed that the structure of the House of Commons was not so faulty as to require any change, then you merited for that language the thanks of your country.—You may remember, sir, that in an early number you condemned, with manly and honest indignation, the inconsistency of Cobbett.—You entered into a comprehensive examination of the principles which he had lately adopted, and into the nature of what he called the evils of the constitution. These were twofold: 1st, That the Members of the Legislature are not fairly chosen by the people ; but are nominated by the influence of great “ families, or purchase

their seats from a junto of venal electors.” *2dly*, “ That placemen and pensioners are allowed to sit in both Houses of Parliament.” Sir, I desire to recal to your recollection the language which you used on that occasion, and to ask, Whether it agrees with your opinions in the number published in March last? You denied, at that former period, that any evil, sufficient to warrant the slightest change, resulted from these two circumstances. You affirmed, that placemen were better in Parliament than any where else; “ that there was no danger of the sale of boroughs” (necessarily including rotten boroughs) “going to such an extent as to put the constitution in any hazard;” and consequently, (as no change has taken place since 1807,) that no danger is now to be apprehended. “ Alterations might, no doubt, be made, which would make the system of election more consistent, and theoretically more perfect, and we are far from insinuating, that some substantial advantages might not accrue from such a reformation. But these advantages, *we are perfectly convinced*, would be extremely in-

considerable, compared with those which we at present enjoy, *and certainly would not be worth purchasing* at the price of any great discontent or hazard to the general system," &c. "In the House of Commons," you told us in a theory new indeed, but perhaps, unexceptionable, "as the great depositary of the political power of the nation, and the virtual representative of the whole three estates, the chief virtue and force of the Government is now habitually resident." "If there be any truth or soundness in the principles of which we have ventured to delineate this hasty and imperfect sketch, the reader will be at no loss to discover the grounds of our objection to Mr Cobbett's fundamental measures of reform, and the reasons for which we must resist any attempt to remove *all place-men and other dependents of the executive* from Parliament, or to exclude altogether the interference of great families in elections." "We think a certain infusion (or, from your train of reasoning precisely, the infusion subsisting in 1807, and therefore still subsisting) of these elements in that assembly, essential to the existence of

our mixed Government, *and should consider the accomplishment* of such a reform as Mr Cobbett wishes, as the signal for its instant destruction." I by no means wish to conceal, that, even at that time, you said that there was great reason for apprehension and for caution, lest the influence of the Crown and the number of placemen, became too great. But "the evil and the danger is from the *multitude* of places and placemen, *not so much from their having places in Parliament*, as from their actual existence, and the enormous amount of the patronage which is necessarily vested in some of these functionaries over which Parliament has an unlimited controul." For venal or rotten boroughs you allowed, that you had no great affection, but proved, that "the independent and well affected part of the nation is far richer than the Government or the Peerage, and if *all* seats in Parliament could be honestly and openly sold for ready money, we have no doubt that a very great majority would be purchased by persons unconnected with the Treasury or the House of Lords. Wealth is one of the *democratical* elements in this trading and

opulent country, and an arrangement, which gave it more immediate political efficacy, would not be at all unfavourable to that part of the constitution."

Though some of your notions in that article are mistaken, I agree most cordially in your general arguments and unanswerable conclusions against reform of all kinds. *Si sic omnia*. But, is this language consistent with the principles which you have delivered in your review of Mr Windham's speech? No. With monstrous tergiversation you have openly declared your wish to see the whole system of rotten boroughs abolished, and, we may say, all the influence of the Crown excluded from the House of Commons; that very influence which, in its *present* state, you pronounced to be essential to the existence of our mixed Government. "The correction of this evil would be no innovation on our constitution, but a beneficial restoration of it both in principle and practice," &c.—The evils resulting from this corruption you now state "as many, and as of a pretty formidable description, but for our present purpose may be summed up under two

main divisions: 1st, The weakening and depravation of that public principle, and general concern for right and liberty, upon which all political freedom must ultimately depend; 2dly, The vast increase of the power of the Crown, by the means which this organized system of corruption affords for bringing the whole weight of its enormous patronage to bear upon the body of the Legislature. The first of these is the grand radical and parent evil from which the second, and a thousand others of less note, are descended legitimately; but the second is the most formidable of all its existing progeny, and may be regarded as the worst and most dangerous of the fruits which it has yet brought to maturity. The vast and alarming extent of this influence, and its actual effects upon the Legislature," (what, since 1807?) "indeed, upon all the higher classes of society, we have in all avowed on a former occasion to explain, and intreat our readers to look back," &c. "An influence it is, we are firmly persuaded, that has increased seven-fold during the present reign, in the actual amount of the patronage and other means of seduction in

which it consists, and seventy-seven-fold in the art of employing these means, and in the power which they have obtained from the circumstances and habits of a great part of the community ; an influence which is not only undermining the foundations of our constitutional liberty, but rendering the Government itself, and the characters of public men, contemptible in the eyes of all who are either above or below the sphere of its operations, and thus preparing the materials of a dreadful explosion, and paving a way for that ominous union of improvidence, corruption, timidity, and actual establishment upon the one hand, and of talents, turbulence, honest enthusiasm,* and political strength on the other, which have so recently covered the face of Europe with the ruins of its ancient Governments. Every plan, therefore, which is calculated to meet the evils from which we actually suffer, should have for its object, as it appears to us ; 1st, To diminish and restrain the influence of the

* Honest enthusiasm ! Of whom ? Of the revolutionary, inhuman Jacobins of France !!

Crown, and then to foster and encourage the love of liberty among the great body of the people." "We have indicated, on a former occasion, the first and most important step which we think should be taken to remove a part of the pressure of this influence from the Legislative Assembly, by a resolute and peremptory exclusion of a great variety of subordinate placemen and minor officers of the Government, who are now allowed to sit in that body." But did you not tell us, sir, that "placemen were better in Parliament than any where else," and "that you must resist all attempts to remove them and other dependents in the executive from that House?" The "next step is, to reduce the actual amount of the influence itself by abolishing all sinecure and unnecessary places and offices." I answer you in your own emphatic language, "we do not speak of sinecures or pensions; these are mere trifles. The most rigorous and unsparing reformer would not state the sum total at a million annually. *It is mere faction* to say, that either this, or the sums lost by speculation, can make any sensible addition to the bur-

dens of a nation which raises fifty millions a-year, or that the poor would be at all relieved by a retrenchment to that extent ; *even as a source of influence*, it is a great deal *too inconsiderable* to deserve any distinguished notice in the general estimate of the patronage now vested in administration.”*

“ After that it may perhaps be found practicable to render corruption more difficult, by multiplying the members, and raising the qualifications of voters, by taking away the right of election of *decayed, inconsiderable*,† and rotten boroughs, and bestowing it on great towns possessing various and divided wealth.” But in the former number, you said, “ that to give every man a vote would probably make but little difference, &c. ; there are some subordinate advantages derived to the people, by making them the electors of their own lawgivers, and we should be well pleased, therefore,” (*i. e.* on that account *at least*) “ to see that privilege extended ; but it

* Vol. 10th, Edinburgh Review.

† This must include those boroughs which are in the hands of great families, which you before said was only the salutary influence of property.

goes so little *to the essence of our constitutional freedom*, that we cannot help thinking that our Parliament would be as useful and valuable as they ever were, though they were mostly composed of persons chosen by lot, or by rotation, from the individuals of a certain fortune and education in each of the counties." Now, sir, I would ask you, in the language of Cobbett, as retorted on him by yourself, "how you can hold up your head, or even exist under the proof of such a glaring tergiversation ;" tergiversation so shameless, so unwarranted by any change of circumstances. When you denounced the foul principles and views of Cobbett, you said that you saw the seeds of a revolution in the present aspect of the country, and were sensible of the hazard of our situation. Has any alteration of the times shewn the fallacy of your notions, either in this respect or with a reference to reform? No, sir; the events of every day serve more and more to confirm us in the assurance, that the principles of reform are false, pernicious, and destructive; that they are a part of that system of the French Jacobins, which, in

the words of Mr Pitt, carried theoretical absurdity higher than the wildest imaginations of the most extravagant visionaries ever conceived, and practical evil to an extent which no age has ever equalled. Every newspaper gives us indubitable proofs, that, in the present temper of the times, the slightest innovation would at once unhinge the attachment of the people to their constitution, would encourage the seditious to aim their thrusts at its more vital parts, and ultimately occasion all the horrors and desolation which the new-fangled doctrines of reform so inevitably introduce. Far from any change having taken place, have we not, sir, since 1807, seen the most strenuous endeavours made to stir up the minds of the people, by inflammatory publications against our Sovereign and our Government, in which you also have loudly joined? Have we not seen the most atrocious and malignant libels against the whole system of British polity and law circulated with the utmost avidity? Are there not, throughout the country, a set of discontented Democrats, who, daring to judge of measures and in-

stitutions which they are totally unable to comprehend, instil poison into the minds of our citizens, and represent the Government as arbitrary, tyrannical, and unjust? Is not our military* discipline painted as oppressive and intolerable, in comparison with the *mild; equitable*, conscriptions of Bonaparte? Have not the people been told in a recent pamphlet, which a London Jury (such is the temper of the times) refused to condemn, that they had a right to cashier, dethrone, and punish their lawful Sovereign? Have not the leading demagogues constantly endeavoured to mislead and rouse the unwary multitude, by declaring, that there was a systematic design to overthrow the liberties of the press, by a cruel and vexatious scheme of persecution, at the very moment when their own virulence proved the lenity of the Government, and the existence of the liberty of the press, even to the endangering of its own existence? Is there not a conspiracy, not only to vilify and traduce every public man, but

* I could not, sir, admire Mr Brougham's remarks on our military system, on two late trials:—remarks as daring false as they were dangerous and inflammatory.

even to bring into disrepute the princes of the blood? Nay, at the very moment when you were penning your review of Mr Windham's speech, the Irish mails brought us intelligence that there had been an attempt by a body of men (*professing* to forward the claims of the Catholics), to organize the whole of the sister kingdom, by establishing a convention* as numerous as the House of Commons, delegated by the several counties, and employing again corresponding committees in the subordinate districts: An independent power within the Government; in short, a scheme, which, if not high treason, was calculated to produce all the revolutionary effects of it. Have we not seen the temper of the nation fearfully demonstrated by the alarming riots in London? Should not that warn us of holding out to the people imposing but dangerous ideas of innovation?

Is it at such a moment, when we are threatened by the portentous arms of Bonaparte, and by the insidious and still more

* It was by a scheme of this sort that the Scotch covenants annihilated the power of the injured Charles, and raised the bloody standard of rebellion.

dangerous arts of traitors and malcontents at home ; is it true patriotism to foment those dissensions, which you once so earnestly deprecated ; to recommend measures which you have exploded as fraught with ruin and hazard to the state ; and to call out for the very reform, which, but three short years ago, you told us it would be faction to support, and madness to attempt.

That we may in many situations see reason to alter our opinions, I am far from wishing to deny. Whenever a change of circumstances, or practical demonstration, shall have shewn their futility or pernicious tendency, it would be mean and unmanly to adhere to them. But, sir, when the events of every day only give us stronger proof of the truth of our principles ; when, by experience, they are seen to be sound and unexceptionable ; when there is not the slightest rational ground to induce us to relinquish them, it is then unprincipled and dishonourable to abandon tenets thus established, and to adopt those which we have always held up to public opprobrium as dangerous and levelling. I cannot help adding, in your words respecting Cobbett,

that I am entitled to say, that the proof which I have now brought forward, but which will be clearer seen by comparing the two numbers, “ should disable your judgment, and detract from your authority, upon all the subjects to which that proof is applicable. Whatever influence or reputation you may have acquired by your earlier writings, should operate against the doctrines which you are now employed in promulgating, and all the effect which your arguments may have produced on your admirers, should turn to the prejudice of those maxims to which you now require their assent. A man who has never been zealous for his party or opinions, may desert them without much reproach ; but it must always be an awkward evolution, for one who had been distinguished for confidence, and who has no sooner made the transition, than he renews the violence which he had formerly exerted on the opposite side. By the uncharitable, such a man always will be regarded as a professional bully, without principle or sincerity, whose services may be bought by any one who will pay their price to his

avarice and other passions; and the most liberal must consider him as a person without any steadiness or depth of judgment, accustomed to be led away by hasty views and occasional impressions, entitled to no weight nor authority in questions of delicacy and importance, and likely to be found in arms against his old associates on every material change in his own condition, or in that of the country.” *

You will pardon me, sir, if I have used somewhat strong language in reprobating this unjustifiable inconsistency. But the language is your own, and I am not accustomed to “*mince the sin, and mollify damnation with a phrase.*”

According to your own practice, “*Je ne puis rien nommer, si ce n’ est pas son nom J’ appelle un chat—un chat.*” I shall now, sir, proceed to examine your present principles, and the evils which, you now allege, attend the faulty formation of the House of Commons.

I must first, however, object to your unfair method of imputing to others sentiments

* Edinburgh Review, Vol. 10

which they did not hold, as you represented. “Mr Pitt,” say you, “in the reforming period of his life, denounced the sale of seats, both in his speeches and resolutions, in the most unmeasured terms.” From this sentence, every one, who does not know the contrary, must naturally conclude, that Mr Pitt, during *the whole reforming period of his life*, not only condemned, but also wished for the abolition of the sale of seats. Now, sir, you must know, that though Mr Pitt did indeed censure the practice in rather severe terms in his first motion for reform; yet, in his second speech, that he declared that he was not only, from reflection, forced to give up his former wishes of abolishing rotten boroughs, but that he even spoke of them in very *qualified* terms, “that he held these boroughs in the light of deformities, which, in some degree, *disfigured* the fabric of the constitution, but which, he found, could not be removed without endangering the whole pile. They ought to be considered, not only as places of franchise, but as places where the franchise was in some measure connected with property by bur-
gage tenure.” I have only dwelt upon

this, to shew that you have not the judgment and reflection of his comprehensive mind to sanction your levelling plans of reform.

“ The simplest and most elementary case of borough-mongering is,” you tell us, the disposal of the treasury-seats, as you call them. Then follows a description of the whole process, in too long a form to transcribe, and most wonderfully minute and precise for the detail of a system, which, in fact, you yourself know, exists but in the visions of your own disordered imagination. I am astonished at the cool, easy, and confident manner, in which you describe practices, of the very existence of which you have no proofs whatever. To mislead and deceive the people, and, at this awful conjuncture, to render them dissatisfied and ripe for insurrection, by such unfounded assertions and wilful misrepresentations, is not patriotism, but factiousness and sedition. Allowing, however, for a moment, that your statement is correct, how is it possible, that this corruption should, as you aver, originate in so very slight a degree from the *people*? If an at-

torney (taking the case as you put it) establishes himself in a borough, where the number of electors is not great, acquires the controul of a considerable number of votes, by the judicious employment of a little capital, and by cajoling, soliciting, promising, and actually bribing, is able to nominate the Member, I do assert, that here the corruption *does* originate in the greatest degree with the people. They consent, they aid and promote the acquisition of this influence; without encouragement and assistance from them, it is self-evident that the efforts of any man must be utterly fruitless. Nor can they (in common sense) have been blind to the intention and views of such a vile agent of iniquity. With them, if such practices do exist, lies the whole evil, though not *all* the moral guilt. It is their disposition, their readiness to be bribed, which throws temptation in the way of these political panders, and which alone enables them to succeed. Thus, while you blame Mr Windham for the partial case which he put, you have represented your own case in a much more unfair manner. Through all your train of reasoning, you

proceed on the unauthorised assumption, (granting you that this evil exists), that the attorney is constantly to offer his seat to the treasury. You do, indeed, notice, (but in a way so slight as naturally to withdraw attention) that the seat may sometimes be sold to the opposition bidders. In this method of arguing, in the first place, you fall into a most glaring and irreconcilable contradiction, with respect to fact. In a passage which I have already quoted, we are told that the independent part of the nation is much richer than any one interest, and a majority of the venal boroughs is bought by persons unconnected with the treasury. So, then, must they be in your case also. The attorney, or whoever is the go-between, will naturally offer the seat, which is at his disposal, to those who are best able to bid high for it. I must next complain of this partial manner of stating the grievance, on a broader and a more important ground. To hold out to the people, in this uncandid way, that it is the Government alone which makes use of this system of corruption, is, in the highest degree, insidious and mischievous. Sir, the lower

orders have of late heard enough of the crimes, intrigues, and venality of cabinets and governments. They have been sufficiently alienated from all administrations. The oppression, depravity, and injustice of their rulers, have been industriously rung into their ears, in all possible changes. In such circumstances, then, what can we think of the conduct of that man, who can wilfully throw into the back ground every suspicion, that any other part of the community, except the Government, is to blame; who can impute the whole corruption to the rulers of the state?

Hic niger est; Hunc tu, Britanne, caveto.

But I must deny the truth of your statement in every one particular. No such practice goes on. There may be one or two unfortunate instances; but this is not, as you affirm, a regular plan and organized system of borough-mongering. I should be inclined, therefore, to ascribe this “weakening of the general concern for right and liberty, upon which all political freedom must ultimately depend,” if such weakening does take place, to the licentiousness

and loose morals of the people, not to any corruption in the mode of electing Members to the House of Commons, which never could have any prevalent effect. But I ask, What marks do we see of any declining concern for their own right and freedom among the people? Does the temper of the country; does the increasing curiosity about public affairs, and about the internal direction of the state, manifest this expiring spirit of liberty? God knows, the people of Britain are sufficiently alive to their own rights and interest. They are "*familiarized with the spectacles, themes, and occasions, which remind them of their rights and duty.*" "It is, however," you observe, "quite necessary, in order that public opinion be sufficiently strong, *or enlightened, to resist* corruption, that a large body of the people be taught to set a value upon the rights which it is qualified to possess; that their reason, their moral principles, their pure and habitual feelings, should all be engaged on the side of their political independence; that this attention should be frequently directed to their rights and duties, as citizens of a free state. It is of

infinite and incalculable importance, in order to spread among the people the feelings of their political blessings, to exercise them unceasingly in the evolutions of a free constitution ; and to train them to those sentiments of pride, jealousy, and self-esteem, which arise naturally from the experience of their own value and importance in the great order of society, and upon which alone the fabric of a free Government can be safely rested.”* I must stop to animadvert on the dangerous tendency of this principle. Can it ever be of advantage, of incalculable importance, to the preservation of just order and discipline of Government, that in Britain (where our civil liberty is secured by such impregnable barriers) the people should be exercised in the evolutions of a free state? That they should be constantly taught their own political consequence, be ever reminded of their rights, and be trained in the sentiments of pride, jealousy, and self-esteem?

* What is this but the language of one of the illuminati; of one who knows all the steps to raise the people from ignorance, from old prejudices and loyalty, to the more *enlightened* views of unrestrained independence?

Or is it salutary for the whole economy and subordination of society, that the people should be taught the defects, rather than the excellencies, of our constitution? If then, as reason teaches us to believe, it is not productive of any beneficial consequences, can we exculpate the man who has declared, that it was his study to afford the nation every possible opportunity of contemplating the defects of their institutions? * Whatever *may* have been your *object* in so doing, there is not a more effectual way to render the people dissatisfied and sulky, to disgust them with our system of public polity, and to stir them up to mutiny and sedition. I am unwilling, sir, to impute such a design to any set of men; but though your intentions may have been pointed to another object, certainly your language has always tended to produce this effect. Throughout your pages, the sentiments favour so strongly and so systematically any *uncharitable* constructions of this nature, that many will be of opinion, and certainly not without very strong grounds,

* See NO. 33. Art. French Crim. Jurisprudence.

that you had in view the full design of exciting general discontent at least, if not absolute insurrection. In analyzing the system of criminal jurisprudence, established in France by Bonaparte, you compare with it the analagous part of our own code. And what must be the feelings,—the indignation of every true Briton, on hearing that our criminal law is considered as in many respects inferior to Bonaparte's caricature of justice; that our wise impartial administration of justice (the noblest monument which the sagacity of man ever raised) was not only degraded by a comparison with the arbitrary code of a most inhuman despot, but even accounted inferior to it, and lamentably deficient in itself; nay, that the French, under the tyranny of Bonaparte, have less danger to apprehend of being tried by *packed* juries, than that to which we, "our *privileged selves*," are exposed. Good God! sir, is this language to be endured? Do you flatter yourself that you will be permitted to employ language which the most seditious democrat never had the audacity to use? If the subject is exposed to the risk of packed juries, if he

is constantly liable to be condemned by men under improper influence, it is the solemn and bounden duty of your colleague in Parliament (who, from not disavowing, must be supposed to agree with you in every particular) to lay the matter before the Legislature. Why, then, is not this done? Because you know, that your assertion is false, and an infamous libel on the constitution. But this daring and wilful misrepresentation is not enough. You continue your attacks upon the spirit and execution of our laws. After a variety of conclusions, (equally false and groundless with the one noticed) you sum up the first part of your comparison with saying, that the preliminary business before the trial is done more perfectly, and with less oppression, under the French Government than in this country. I will not, sir, enter into any refutation of such deliberate and designing calumnies. I trust that the law affords means of preventing such sentiments from being instilled into the minds of the people. If, however, the lenient spirit of our constitution does allow the liberty of the press to be so shamefully prostituted to the basest

and most unworthy purposes, the character of that man (be he who he may,) will ever appear black and foul, who durst hold out to the nation, at this perilous crisis, that *our* impartial and *mild* code was rigour in comparison to the severity of an uncontrolled and all-directing tyrant, jealous of every breath, and of every whisper against his authority, and active in detecting every secret murmur of resentment or complaint. It is a curious circumstance, say you, “that the people of England should look upon the institution of jury trial as an indispensable, and nearly all-sufficient safeguard, against absolute power, and that Bonaparte should manifest great solicitude to bestow jury trial in penal cases upon the people of France.” Solely for this satisfactory reason, that the trial by jury in this country is fixed and guarded by the laws, in such a manner, that, if seconded by a corresponding degree of sober steady virtue in the people, it never can *again* be made the tool of injustice and tyranny, but must continue to be the great bulwark of our civil liberty: whereas, in France, the whole machinery of criminal jurisprudence is

moved by the will of one man, and the juries are so entirely under his management, that this institution not only cloaks his iniquitous system with the appearance of impartiality, but, by withdrawing the odium from himself, even assists him greatly in executing any tyrannical measures. If the case before the court is not of a nature in which his interest is concerned, then the trial by jury appears a fair and unexceptionable mode of procedure, and will serve to render the French more contented; while, on the other hand, in the case of a state prisoner, the verdict of the jury stands between him and the curses of his people. But, can any man seriously affirm, that the French trial is superior to ours in dignity and propriety in one single respect? As to your objections about the old obsolete phrases in ours, I would refer you to some excellent observations in the first number of the *British Review*. I do not think it necessary to refute all your frivolous and far-fetched accusations against our criminal code. It is only the tendency of them that I blame. And certain I am, that it is mischievous and insidious, to re-

present to the nation, that our form of trial is less decorous than that followed in Bonaparte's juridical pantomime.

I must now, however, return to the examination of your *present* principles on reform.

Nothing, perhaps, has been more misrepresented than the influence of the Crown. Against this overbearing influence, every *patriot*, for the last thirty years, has endeavoured to warn the people. This is not the first nor the second time that we have been standing (to use the celebrated words of Mr Pitt) behind the last dyke of the constitution. Our liberty has been undermined, our privileges infringed, the liberty of the press trampled upon, and the nation reduced to the very verge of ruin, by this irresistible power, again and again. But we have still survived. Our prosperity has been unparalelled, and we still enjoy liberty, and independence, and happiness, beyond what any other nation ever possessed.

Has there, then, been no change in the mutual relation of the different orders of the state? Yes. In proportion as the influence of the Crown is said to have in-

creased, it has been gradually diminished, while the power and weight of the people has been augmented in an alarming degree.

In your opinion, however, “ the influence of the Crown has increased seven-fold during the present reign, in the actual amount of the patronage and other means of seduction, in the disposal of which it consists, and seventy-seven-fold in the art of employing those means,” &c. If such is the state of the country, far be it from me to deprecate for a moment the application of the remedy so imperiously demanded by circumstances. But, if we shall find, on an attentive consideration of the subject, that the influence of the Crown has not only not gained any additions, or produced any alarming effects upon our freedom, but that it has even diminished and is diminishing, then, sir, I assert, that it is treason to the constitution to lower and degrade its value in so foul a manner in the eyes of the people. That the sovereign has some political weight in the nation, from the patronage of so many offices, and from the disposal of such a multitude

of necessary places, I am neither prepared nor willing to deny. But I cannot see any proofs that his importance gives him an undue influence over the minds of any class of men,* or that it is undermining the foundations of our constitution, and filing away the links of civil liberty. On the contrary, the Crown has really less influence, and exerts less the little which it does possess, than during the administration of Sir Robert Walpole. It is absurd and dangerous to reason on this subject on vague and indeterminate grounds. Let us look back to facts, and see when this "*terrible*" influence has shewn itself. Lord North was said to have exerted it more than any man, and yet, sir, the clamours of opposition of that day took the cabinet by storm, in spite of the accumulated efforts of the government. But what, sir, can be a stronger proof, that the Crown has no undue influence in the House of Commons, than that a motion which tended to annihilate its

* It is customary to rank the disposal of places in the army and navy as one of the great sources of the improper influence of the Crown, but this is so manifestly absurd, that I do not think it necessary to answer it.

constitutional influence was at first carried triumphantly by Mr Dunning? Surely, if the influence of the King were so overwhelming, it would have been exerted at this period. A sense of public duty did at last urge the House to resist this dangerous motion. Never was the resentment of disappointed faction more strongly marked, than in the impotent effusions of rage which this conduct called forth. It was represented as monstrous, as base, as dishonourable, as treacherous, &c. The salvation of the liberty of Britain, exclaimed they, depended on the success of that motion, and on the extirpation of that baneful influence which had poisoned the fountain of freedom, and been the cause of all our national calamity. In spite of the wisdom of these political quacks, I cannot but reckon this attempt as the first of that long series of struggles between the true principles of government, the necessary regulation of society, and the only free constitution now remaining in the world, on the one hand, and between those wild visionary theories about liberty, first promulgated by the followers of the new philoso-

phy, which have occasioned the misery of mankind. This attempt was, in my opinion, the first attack by these designing democrats, who, for near thirty years, have been endeavouring to sap the foundations of our constitution, and to erect, on its ruins, the deformed fabric of a licentious, and (thank God) always a short-lived republic. What, sir, has enabled our King and his Ministers to baffle all their efforts, and to bid defiance to the fury of the tempests which have swept away the proudest kingdoms of the earth? What, but the spirit of that inestimable constitution, which the experience of every day awfully demonstrates to be the most glorious fabric of human polity? What, but that very influence which has been decried as venal and corrupt; and which has been represented as paving the way for the total overthrow of our Government? How loudly do facts give the lie to the loose and mischievous theories thus circulated with the most depraved effrontery? This immense, this irresistible power, never could have supported even Mr Pitt against the coalition party, though he was known to possess

the confidence and wishes of his Majesty, if an appeal to the judgment and good sense of the nation had not broken that formidable phalanx of aristocratical ambition. In no one part, in short, of this long and happy reign, is there one instance of an improper weight resident in the Crown. "The long continuance of Mr Pitt in office, you will reply, proceeded from this destructive source." Mr Pitt, sir, was supported by immense majorities in both Houses,—by the voice of the country. The opposition, at one time, indeed, was confined, within Parliament, to a small determined band of forty or fifty, and among the people, almost exclusively to the discontented or seditious. "The very existence of the *present* ministry" (the uniform supporters of their country and their King,) "proves the influence to be enormous." Here, again, the voice of the nation is against you. Numerous and powerful as is the opposition to Mr Percival, I am convinced, and the temper of the country bears me out, that a very great majority, indeed, of the independent, sensible, and

reflecting part of the people, though they may not all, perhaps, on some points, agree with him, do approve of his principles and his measures. His integrity, his honour, and his firmness, no liberal man *now* questions.

To pass to another prominent circumstance in the present reign, I would ask you, Does a late impeachment, when the malignity and virulence of party prosecuted worth and patriotism with such bitter animosity, shew any proofs of the alarming influence of the Crown? I really am at a loss to conceive how you have the confidence to assert such palpable absurdity. The influence of the Crown! What! when the most common-place observer is convinced, that it is the power and increasing weight of the people which is to be dreaded, when the whole state of the nation shews that the King's patronage has neither affected the independence of any class of men, nor has in any degree weakened and debased the public concern for the rights and liberty of the people. If any foreigner, a stranger to the heat and principles of the different parties, were to examine carefully

the situation and internal state of the nation, the character of the various orders of society, and to consider the nature and spirit of this constitution, and then to read your last remarks on the influence of the Crown, he would hardly believe it possible that it had any reference to this country. He would naturally ask, Where is the preparation for the dreadful explosion which the influence of the Sovereign is to occasion? "How, or where, is it paving the way for an ominous union of turbulence and actual establishment, improvidence, and honest enthusiasm? I see nowhere, he would add, any marks of the dangerous power or patronage of the Monarch; no signs of his corrupting and venal authority. But I see a people, who, from an excess of freedom, and an abuse of their power, and of the liberty of the press, have assumed an importance and weight, which the constitution never intended they should possess, gradually usurping the whole executive Government, encroaching on the necessary and lawful prerogatives of the King, and attempting to destroy the salutary influence of hereditary honour, and landed property.

I see a nation, which, from a long course of uninterrupted prosperity, from a long enjoyment of the blessings of freedom, and from the most uncontrolled exercise of almost unlimited rights, has become fastidious and restless, murmuring at trifles, discontented at every exertion of legitimate prerogative ; from a total inexperience of misfortune and oppression, dissatisfied with a degree of liberty, hardly compatible with the maintenance of subordination and the preservation of Government. I see a nation, happy in the possession of every privilege and comfort.—A nation, which, during the most eventful contest that the history of the world has recorded, has risen to an unexampled height of commerce, resources, dominion, and solid power, yet, endeavouring to dash the cup of happiness and freedom from its own lips, and to destroy a constitution which, in its present form, has been the ultimate grand cause of all its opulence and renown.”

Sir, I am no advocate for corruption ; I do not, nor will I ever, from party or interested motives, defend an unlawful and hazardous influence in the Crown, but I

must add, that I rather would see this Government an arbitrary monarchy, than that the people should acquire any greater consequence than they possess at present; or that, in the existing state of the country, the Crown should be curtailed in the exercise of any one prerogative; because I am convinced, that such changes would lead to absolute revolution, from that to anarchy, and from anarchy to pure military despotism, which, experience has now taught us, is the last stage in the desolating march of revolution.

As to the immediate influence which the Crown is said to exercise in the House of Commons, from as accurate a consideration of the subject as frequent reflection has enabled my poor abilities to make, I am clearly of opinion that it is, to the utmost extent, indispensably necessary, not only to the existence of the monarchy, but to the safety and liberty of the kingdom. This influence you defended most ingeniously, perhaps on new, but certainly on unexceptionable grounds: You shewed, that, from the gradual operation of many causes, the balance of the three orders of the state now

necessarily lay in the Lower House ; that it possesses nearly the whole legislative authority ; and, therefore, if the weight of the King in that Assembly were diminished, that the balance would be destroyed. Has this balance lost its mode of operation since 1807 ? No. Things remain exactly in the same situation as in that year. There has not even been a new Parliament. What then must every liberal and impartial man think of your present professions of belief ? Who will pretend to say that your opinions are of any weight ? Or that you have not forfeited every claim to rectitude and consistency of principle ? Without going so far as to say, that the regular operating balance of the constitution now rests on the House of Commons, I, nevertheless, think, that on grounds somewhat analogous to this, the influence of the Crown may, with truth, be defended.

By the constitution of this country, the King, Lords, and Commons, were originally destined to be equally poised, to form a mutual check upon each other, and thus to give congruity to materials apparently of a nature incompatible. But, from the

action of a variety of circumstances, and from the change that has taken place in the state of society, the Commons have gradually obtained more weight and more importance than formerly. If, then, the King had not been able to counteract this increasing power, (and how could this be done effectually, unless in the House of Commons itself) the balance of the Government would have been long since broken. The very idea, that the separate influence of the Crown could make any stand against this impetuous current, is quite absurd. The House of Commons holds the purse of the nation. On its pleasure depends the resources, and money, and patronage, &c. by which the King is said to retain this corrupt influence. If, then, he could not oppose a weight in this Assembly to the rising power of the people, (though this weight at present is really uncertain) it is evident, that he would be but a cypher in the state, and dependent on the will and bounty of Parliament. Charles I. had no weight in that House, except through those moderate adherents who reprobated the unconstitutional and infuriate measures of his oppo-

nents.—His fall was loud and ominous. Since that period the Commons have become more powerful, they have absorbed, in some measure, the authority of the other two orders, and the King is still less able to oppose them. Nothing more clearly evinces the truth of this position, than that the House of Lords, which is naturally intended to be a check, both upon the encroachment of the Crown, and upon the licentiousness of the people, has now become the guardians and supporters of the declining authority of the Crown. Of this, many instances might be brought forward, especially when an aristocratic party attempted to force upon the King ministers disagreeable to himself and to the nation, and then to pass an act subversive of the principles of the constitution, the House of Lords resented the attacks upon his prerogative, and, to the utmost of their power, supported his authority.* In short, to use the words of an eminent lawyer, England has not only in its *forms* the most democratical Government that ever existed in

* Sir James Macintosh, (speech for Mr Peltier).

any *great* country, but, even in *substance*, the most democratical constitution that ever existed in *any* country: if, added he, “ the most substantial democracy be that state in which the greatest number of men feel an interest, and express an opinion on political subjects, and thus the greatest number of judgments and wills concur in influencing the public measures,” and in which the representatives of the people have an unlimited controul over the whole revenue and resources of the country, and can trample under foot every attempt at resistance: In such circumstances, it is absolutely necessary, in order that the King retain his real and just importance in the state, that he have some influence in the House of Commons. Deprive him of this influence, and you lodge the whole executive, as well as legislative, authority in that body. Alter the constitution in this respect, and you annihilate the just independence of the Crown. Where, sir, would be the boasted equipoise of this Government,—Where would be that balance between the three branches of the Legislature, which, as Mr Pitt said, our ancestors have mea-

sured out with such precision, if this influence, branded as it is with the names of infamy, baseness, and venality, be taken away? The prerogative and the power of the Crown (and this must be admitted by you, who maintain that they were erected for the use of the people), are a part of the rights of the people; they are a part of the benefit which they derive from a limited monarchy; and where, sir, is the security of any of our privileges, if you invade the best and most important of them all? Far, then, from thinking that this influence of the Crown (which is, however, but indirect and inconsiderable) can ever put our liberty to any hazard; from practical reasoning, I am convinced, that a Parliament, totally independent, and distinct and separate in its power, would be contrary to the essence of the constitution, and, in the present state of affairs, not only prove the destruction of the monarchy, but introduce all the horrors of anarchy and licentiousness. In your last number, you scout the idea that the people have, within the last fifty years, gained any increase of political power and independence. I confess, sir, I did not ex-

pect that you would have had the hardiness to deny a fact which is evident to every one, and which not even *you can, in your conscience*, disbelieve. You allow, that there has been a vast increase in the wealth and luxury of the nation, but contend, that the increase has not occasioned a proportional rise in the power of the people, but has only rendered them more open to the exercise of the corrupt influence of the Crown.* “The same temptations which were repelled by the simple poverty of Fabricius, would, in all probability, have bought half the golden satraps of the Persian monarch, or swayed the counsel of wealthy and venal^o Rome in the splendid days of Catiline and Cæsar.” I cannot think this reasoning so triumphantly conclusive as you flatter yourself. On the contrary, it is to me incomprehensible, how a sum which, in the days of simple poverty, when wealth and money were almost unknown, was judged sufficient to assail the virtue and integrity of Fabricius, could bribe men wallowing in affluence and luxury, who

* See Number 34.

were accustomed to be bought by millions, and to whom this offer would be but a trifle. How, in short, the small cheap allurements, the toy, or the bead which corrupts the savage, can ever influence man in the splendid and overflowing prosperity of the present age, or of venal Rome. It is, in short, contrary to all the passions of human nature. The increase of wealth, of luxurious and expensive habits, may, I allow you, lessen the interest and jealousy with which a nation, at a former period, may have regarded public affairs, and render it more careless about the purity and virtue of the Government: It may, likewise, generate a swarm of needy adventurers ready to be caught by the first temptation, and draw a greater portion of the people within the sphere and agency of ambition: But the rapid progress of opulence and luxury has not had the effect in Britain which you represent. As the wealth and expensive habits of the people have risen, so, it is perfectly undeniable, they have taken more and more interest in politics; they have gradually examined, with a closer eye, into the secret manage-

ment of the state, and shewn a disposition to remodel, to innovate, and reform, which oversets the theory which you have here laid down. But, what has been the result of this attention to public affairs, while it did not break through the bounds of moderation?—That *if* any of the channels of office were clogged by corruption, they have now been purified from all venality and intrigue. So close, indeed, and scrutinizing is the public eye, that it is not possible that any minister would venture to exercise the little corrupt and undue influence the Crown may have. The increase of the power of the people has, however, proceeded from other causes than the mere augmentation of wealth. The very interest which they have taken in public business,—the proud presumptuous manner in which they pretend to judge of the institutions and interests, arrangement, and economy of the Government,—the weight which they attach to their own wishes and opinions, and the high idea of their rights and natural importance, which they have imbibed from the contagious influence of French principles, disseminated among

them with the most mischievous industry, are among the many sources of the alarming increase of their consequence. Nor is it true, that no danger is to be apprehended from what you term the prodigious development of the understanding and intelligence in the great mass of the people, or (in more correct language) from the prodigious development of seditious and democratical principles. This improved intelligence, and “more perfect intercourse,” which you try to separate from the political weight of the people, I reckon the most dangerous and baneful of all possible situations, and the most irrefragable and conclusive argument against every plan of retrenching the power of the Crown, or of raising the influence of the people.* “When the old instinctive feelings of loyalty and implicit obedience, have pretty generally given way to shrewd calculations, as to their own interest, their own powers, and *the rights which arise out of those powers*; when kings and nobles, ministers and agents of Government, are no longer looked upon with feel-

* See No. 34.

ings of veneration and of awe, but rather with a mixture of contempt and jealousy ;” when “ their errors and vices are canvassed among all ranks of persons, with extreme freedom and severity ;” when “ the people begin to *feel* their relation to the Government under which they live, and, guided by those feelings and the analogies of their private interests and affections, they begin to form and borrow *opinions* upon the merit or demerit of the institutions and administration to the effects of which they are subjected, and to conceive sentiments either hostile or friendly to such institutions and administration ;” * when the imperfections, or, rather, the alleged imperfections, and deformities of their constitution, are pointed out to them in exaggerated and inflammatory descriptions, with the most *charitable and patriotic* zeal ; when their minds are roused by false representations of venality and defects, and then pointed at particular branches of the Government ; “ when this party is by far the strongest and most for-

* See NO. 34. Edinburgh Review.

midable," (which, however, is not, and, I trust in God, never will be the case); when "it is daily recruited out of the mass of the population, over which *reason* is daily extending its *dominion*, and depends for its ultimate success upon nothing less than the irresistible progress of a free and *enlightened* sense of *interest*, and a feeling of inherent right united to undoubted power;"* when we know that this rising dominion of reason, and growing emancipation from old instinctive feelings of loyalty, and from all former attachment to monarchical and other existing institutions, has been aided and assisted by the too successful propagation of wild and dangerous notions of equality, and the rights of man,—notions inimical to every principle of government, morality, property, and religion; when all

* Edinburgh Review, NO. 34. It is difficult to doubt of the ultimate "triumph of this party." In what? *in total revolution*. You have before given us the language and principles of the Illuminati, the complete doctrine of the expansion of reason, and the dominion of enlightened sense, and this ultimate triumph, I am entitled to construe into an allusion to total revolution. Indeed, the latter part of this paper is extremely offensive, and discovers, more than even the article on Spanish affairs, your Jacobinical principles.

these things are so, (even by your own statement) can any reasonable being say that there are not just grounds for alarm? That the increase of the intellect, activity, available *numbers*, and more perfect intercourse of the people; an increase which, in all human probability, if assisted by the accomplishment of any plan of reform, may subvert the constitution of Britain, and give us up a prey to the scourge and desolating fury of revolution; that this increase should not excite suspicions and even terror? If you feel no such alarm, *solus non times*.

But is it at this moment that you would increase the power of the people? Have the events of the last twenty years not sufficiently exposed the danger of all plans of reform and innovation? Consider, for a moment, the moral causes which have led to the misery and wretchedness of one quarter of the globe, and then, if you dare, repeat this advice. Reflect, in the first place, (if ages crowded into years have not effaced it from your mind), reflect, I say, on the condition of Europe at the commencement of the revolution.—Her numerous independent states, like one family,

linked together by the ties of equity and common interest, and forming one great republic, in which the weaker were protected by the agency of a sober and rational freedom.—Her profound and undisturbed security, and opulence, and commerce; the high state of civilization and literature which she had obtained; the industry and exertions of her inhabitants; and tell me, whether you can imagine a spectacle more sublime, or calculated to give more pleasing ideas to the reflecting eye, of the moral dignity of human nature, and of the degree in which the broad maxims of justice can be made to bear upon political interests,—a situation of things better adapted for the general welfare, comfort, happiness of mankind? Where, now, is that beautiful, and finely ornamented fabric of integrity and justice? It is gone, destroyed for ever. The baneful influence of the proud, shallow, impious philosophy, which pretended to communicate new lights to man, and new ideas of government and morality, dissolved the bonds of civil society, eradicated the principles of property and subordination, and undermined the

foundations of every establishment, civil and religious. Every monument of the former state of Europe has perished. The wild ambitious views of an unprincipled nation have levelled the asylums of virtue and freedom. A dreary, bleak, and solitary desert is spread over the once fertile fields of Europe, teeming with affluence and prosperity, and adorned by the labour of ages. Britain still remains untouched. Her free constitution has escaped entire. From a lofty eminence, secure in her own power and liberty, she looks down with disdain on the malignant attacks of her enemies. She knows that the mercenary slaves of an inhuman tyrant, who has violated every law of morality and religion, and openly derided the power of the Omnipotent, will never prevail against armies of freemen fighting in the cause of true glory, of liberty, and justice. But glorious as is her towering situation, the arbitress of the world, the avenger of prostrate nations, the only bulwark which yet remains to resist efforts of all-grasping tyranny, we see on every side the ruins of powers, and principalities, and thrones; the vestiges of

that desolating tempest, which, like a whirlwind, rooted up the mightiest empires in Europe, and dashed them to the ground with tremendous force. What, sir, has been the ultimate cause of this fearful revolution?—The principles of reform and innovation ;—principles,

“ Which laugh’d to scorn the avenging rod,
And hurl’d defiance to the throne of God ;
Shook pestilence abroad with madd’ning sweep ;
Granted no pause but everlasting sleep.
Blood-guiltiness their crime,—with hell they cop’d.”

Is this, sir, the crisis to act upon any part of the principles which have occasioned such universal horror and destruction? No. By the dreadful misery of France, by the oppression and woe of the rest of Europe, it would be fatal. Hazardous, indeed, it is at all times to unhinge the minds of the people, to let them loose on wild plans of reform in their nature impracticable. In the present circumstances, especially, when all old feelings of subordination and loyalty have been weakened by the insinuating notions of equality, the attachment of the people to their Government

should be cherished with care, as the only efficient safeguard against internal discontent and commotions. No constitution, however excellent and perfect, can ever be of long duration, when the minds of the people are insensibly alienated from it by constantly hearing its defects. Now, sir, if you hold out to the nation that our Government, to which we have so long looked up with pride and admiration, is radically defective, and is disfigured by venal practices, and, consequently, should alter the whole frame of Parliamentary representation, and root out the just influence of the aristocracy and of the Sovereign ; it necessarily follows, that they will not only regard it with less ardour, but will not even view any encroachments with the same jealous suspicion. Once teach them to believe that it is, in some respects, imperfect, by materially changing it, and they will more easily perceive faults in other parts of it. They will be immediately misled by the inflammatory harangues of the factious and designing reformers. On that account, the slightest and most moderate alteration is hazardous. In particular, that which, but

in a single instance, abridges and cuts away the prerogatives and influence of the King. No plan of reform is more pernicious than this. The country has been so well taught to carp and grumble at the supposed vices or excess of power in the Sovereign, that they imbibe with avidity every idea of punishing the one or diminishing the other. It is singular to observe how prevalent, among a certain class, is the notion, that every national failure, every temporary distress, and even the faults of the ministers, are imputable to an irresistible power behind the throne,—to a secret, dark, and venal weight, which crushes all opposition.

On all these, as well as on many other grounds, I cannot but think that all attempts to diminish the influence of the Crown are highly destructive.

I should like, however, to know how we can be assured, that even, if a moderate reform were granted, the people would rest satisfied with this concession, or that the invectives against bribery, speculation, and corrupt influence, would be at all silenced. Innovation, like the gravity of a sinking body, increases in velocity as you advance.

The torrent soon swells till it becomes irresistible, and sweeps away every thing before it.

Let us recollect the happiness and privileges which we enjoy under our present Government, before we allow great changes to be made in it.* “So far,” to use your own words, “from being a country, the measure of whose sufferings is full, and to which every change would be gain, we conceive it to be obvious, on a very slight consideration, that we have attained a greater proportion of happiness and civil liberty, than ever were enjoyed by any other nation; and that the frame and administration of our polity, with all its defects, is the most perfect and beneficial of any that men have yet invented and reduced to practice. We have perfect liberty of person, and security of property; we have an administration of law, that is not only impartial, but even unsuspected; we have freedom of press and of publication, beyond what any other people have experienced; we have wealth, police, and secu-

* See Edinburgh Review, Vol. X.

rity, superior to any other country, and we have no privilege possessing a monopoly of the honours and dignities. These advantages we *have attained* under our present system of Government, and under it there does not seem to be any reason to doubt, that they may be preserved to us entire. We conceive, therefore, that so far from nothing to lose by conquest and revolution, we have infinitely more than ever was possessed by any other people, and that as the good which we already have far exceeds that of which we think we are deprived, it would be, in the highest degree, *criminal* and imprudent to expose it to any considerable hazard for the desperate chance of increasing it by the uncertain issue of a revolution. If these things, however, be at all as we have stated them, *what shall we think of the patriotism or the wisdom* of those, who, *in spite of all this, maintain, that the country is in a deplorable situation, and ripening rapidly for destruction,*" (viz. from the influence of the Crown), "who do what *they can to weaken the attachment of its citizens*, and labour, both directly and indirectly, to render them indifferent

to its fall, at a moment when nothing, perhaps, but the most devoted and unanimous zeal can effect its salvation. We most cordially agree with Mr Cobbett, that there “ is a great deal too much scrambling for places and emolument, both in and out of Parliament, and that the nation suffers, and has suffered, in its most substantial interests by this ignoble scramble.” We admit also, that those who sell their votes for money, act a very base and dishonourable part, and that those who buy them are not a great deal better ; but we deny that this scramble arises either from there being placemen or pensioners in Parliament, or from the interference of peers in elections, or *from the venality of certain boroughs* ; and, so far from being of opinion that the *alteration of these parts of our system*, according to the suggestion of Mr Cobbett, *would cure this or any other evil*, we are persuaded that *such a measure would have a contrary effect*. *Placemen, we think, are better in Parliament than any where else* ; and the influence of great families in the elections of Members, is rather *beneficial* than prejudicial ; and the sale of boroughs, though dis-

honourable to those who are concerned in it, is in no danger of going so far as to put the constitution in any hazard."

"The most perfect representative legislature must be that which re-united in itself the greatest proportion of the effective aristocracy of the country, or contained the greatest proportion of the individuals who actually swayed the opinions of the people by means of their birth, wealth, talents, or popular qualities. In this way it was attempted to be shewn, in a former Number, that the nation was ultimately governed by the same individuals who, in their separate capacities, directed the sentiments of a large majority; and that this was the only way in which the opinions and wishes of the people could be practically represented," &c. "In a country where rank, wealth, and office, constitute the chief sources of influence over individuals, it is proper that rank, wealth, and office, should make the greatest number of its Legislators." After very forcible and accurate reasoning, you sum up your description of the excellence of the House of Commons in these words: "In spite of

placemen, and pensioners, and purchasers of boroughs, and nominees of lords, the House of Commons unquestionably contains a sufficient number and variety of persons to represent all the different opinions, and to maintain the various views of policy which exist in the country at large. There is no sentiment so democratical, no accusation so uncourtly, no interest so local, which does not find there a voice to support and assist it."

Such, sir, is the able and irresistible manner in which you urged (with such peculiar energy) what you seem to sneer at in Mr Windham, the—"sweeping argument, that the constitution is good enough, that the House of Commons is sufficiently adapted to its objects, and that, as there is little or no temptation to change its structure, so there is a positive risk in seeking unknown results by trying new experiments upon it." It is so emphatic and just, that I do not think it necessary to add one single word in confirmation. The correctness of this argument *you* are bound, by every principle of honour and of consistency, to admit and to *maintain*. There has

been no change of circumstances since July 1807, which has affected the structure of the House of Commons. Indeed, there has been no general election, nor has any other circumstance occurred which can have increased, or even exhibited the influence of the Crown. Indeed, the effects of the infamous conspiracy against the Duke of York, is a tremendous proof of the too powerful influence even of the deluded and mistaken opinions of the people.

There still remains a most singular and dangerous position to be taken notice of, in which you insist with more than ordinary vehemence. “ It seems a strange doctrine to be told by any one in this land, and, above all, by the chief votaries and advocates of royal power, that its legal security consists in its means of corruption,” (we deny that it is corruption) “ or *can be endangered by the utmost freedom and intelligence in the body of the people, and the utmost degree of purity and popularity in our elections, so long as the three branches of the legislature are kept unconfounded and*

* See NO. 34. Edinburgh Review.

entire. And in a Government like ours, where all the powers of the Crown are *universally* allowed to exist for the good of the people, it is evidently quite extravagant to fear, that *any* increase of union and intelligence,* any growing love of freedom or of justice in the people, should endanger, or should fail to confirm all their powers and prerogatives." In the first place, every reasonable enemy to retrenchment on the powers of the Crown denies that its legal security consists in its means of *corruption*. Never, indeed, did I hear such a proposition for a moment allowed. In the next place, that the powers and prerogatives of a limited monarch can be increased or confirmed by a growing love of independence, and an improved intelligence and union in the body of the people, appears to me an hypothesis as extravagant as it is dangerous. An anxiety and clamorous attachment to their rights, in the people of any free state, is at all times a very alarming and perilous symptom. Far be it from me, sir, to wish,

* Namely, corresponding committees, and all the other instruments and branches of organized sedition.

for a moment, to crush that rational and tempered love of freedom, on which the existence of our constitution depends; but when the people take so much interest, as at this day, in the public affairs, and in the management of the Government; when they exhibit so licentious a spirit, recognizing no authority, impatient at every privation and restraint, it is absurd to affirm that the Crown can be strengthened by such a temper in the nation.

“In a Government like ours, where *all the powers of the Crown* are allowed to exist for the *good of the people*,” &c. It is impossible, indeed, to deny, that the institution of the Sovereign did originate from the nature and necessities of society, and in that way that they exist, as do likewise the distinction of People and Nobles, for the good of the community. But since king and nobles are necessary, as well as the body of the people, to the existence of society, it is mischievous and levelling to affirm, that they are mere puppets, whose power may be curtailed or altered, just as suits the pleasure of the people. Where the king is made, as in Britain, a fixed part of the con-

stitution, I assert, that we should consult his interest, as well as those of the people, and that his power should be guarded with the same care with the liberty of the subject, as being, at least, equally necessary for the community. A lawful and legitimate Sovereign is one of the three orders of the state, and is as much to be regarded and supported as the people or the aristocracy, although, in his separate capacity, he is but an individual. If, then, the King exists for the comfort and discipline of society, the people also are constituted, in their present condition, for the good of the King and the Nobles. The latter, again, hold their present rank for the advantage of the King and the Commons. This is, at least, the most rational, and certainly the safest way of viewing the case. I must, however, object strongly to the propagation of a doctrine, which, in the meaning that this and the revolutionary paper on Spanish affairs entitle us to put on it, is not only of an inflammatory nature, but, without exception, the most pernicious political tenet which the wildest theorist ever started. This was the fundamental principle of the

infuriated French Jacobins. It was this principle which hurled the royal family of the Bourbons from their throne, and finally brought the wretched Lewis, and his unfortunate queen, to the public scaffold, and upon their throne has seated your immaculate Bonaparte. It is, then, very suspicious to see any set of men industriously circulating, and even, with this awful warning before their eyes, inculcating such ideas on the people, at a moment when they have been prepared, by the constant and unremitting exertions of twenty years, to imbibe them so readily. "If the people," you say, "have arisen into greater consequence, let them have greater power. If a greater proportion of our population be now capable and desirous of exercising the functions of free citizens, let a greater number be admitted to the exercise of those functions."

But, sir, is it seriously expedient to give the people more power, by admitting a greater number to the elective franchise? In my opinion, indisputably not. Where, however, and in what manner are we to begin? And where are we to stop? Is

there no danger to be apprehended, that we may not be able to check this power? In a passage already quoted, you told us, that any degree of power could not endanger the security of the Crown, and, luckily, nothing is more easy than to reduce “this growing power of the people within its legitimate bounds,” &c. Have we the voice of omnipotence to command the turbulent and boisterous raging of the people, and to say to the swelling waves, thus far shalt thou go and no farther? Can the torrent, which has once broken through its embankments, and rushed impetuous over the plain, be restrained by any artificial obstacles, or recalled to its original channel? Can the whirlwind be opposed by the obstacles which resist the ordinary force of the wind?

I cannot, sir, bring these remarks to a close, without commenting on the almost unaccountable eagerness with which you seize every opportunity to palliate the revolting crimes of Bonaparte, and to hold him out to the country, as irresistible, from his talents and resources. In this partiality for him, you are not the only, though the

loudest, partizan : “ While we,” exclaimed Lord Melville, with honest indignation, “ have been bearing up the spirit of the country, and encouraging the people to encounter manfully the difficulties and dangers to which they were unavoidably exposed ; conspirators have been magnifying every reverse which we happened to sustain, and exaggerating, in the most glowing colours which their degenerate hearts and wicked imaginations could suggest, the success of our enemies. In former days, the tribute of praise due to the success of hostile generals has been left to the grateful applause and admiration of their own country. But in proportion as Bonaparte and his men have been successful, in combating the interests, and in defeating the exertions of the allies of this country, exactly in this proportion have they found in Britain their ablest and warmest panegyrists ; and there is no hero or statesman, either ancient or modern, who has not been brought forward as a foil to set off the lustre which has been ascribed to these enemies of this nation. This observation, as applicable to Bonaparte, is the more striking, when it is recollected, that,

in the first moments of his power, he was the object of execration and invective of every jacobin in Europe, and nowhere more than in this country ; because in his usurpation of power he was, truly indeed, supposed to have subverted the whole principles and basis of that *most glorious fabric which the world ever saw* ; but no sooner had he become a successful statesman and warrior, in opposition to the interests of Great Britain and its allies, than all his errors and excesses, all his disregard for the rights of man, and the whole system of the revolution, were consigned to oblivion, and the pens and tongues which had originally inveighed most bitterly against him, became the most enthusiastic admirers of his character, the most indefatigable panegyrists of his success, and the most strenuous advocates of his ambition : I wish I could, with truth, assert, that such language had never found its way within the walls of Parliament.” * This line of conduct you,

* See speech of Lord Melville, (then Mr Dundas) on 25th March 1801, on Mr Grey’s motions for an inquiry in to the state of the nation.

sir, have uniformly pursued. “ He *has some flaws* in his character that do not perfectly become a hero. He is more irascible and vindictive, it seems, than some others have been, but his insatiable ambition, with his disregard for the tears and comforts of others, are very much in the *common style*. We do not know that he is worse than the common run of conquerors or *arbitrary princes*, and are inclined to place him, as for general character, not far from the level of the great Frederick or the illustrious Catharine.” Bonaparte on a level with Frederick and Catharine ! A monster disgraced with the most infamous cruelty, dissimulation, and impiety ; who, in cool blood, has butchered thousands of helpless prisoners, and even poisoned the brave wounded soldiers whose valour alone gained him victory ; who has broken all faith and treaties, and, with diabolical perfidy, overrun whole neutral nations ; who has openly forsworn his God and his religion. Yet this is the scourge of mankind, in whose wars you found no more slaughter, and no

* Edinburgh Review, Vol. X.

more contempt for law and justice, than in those of Prince Eugene. Sir, I appeal to the groans and misery of Europe.—I refer you to the oppressed and desolated condition of Austria, Holland, Russia, Switzerland, and Germany ; there you will see awful proofs of an hellish inhumanity, which never before was instanced ; of an unprincipled violation of every law, human and divine, which the most wicked imagination never conceived ; and of a tyranny too grinding and shocking in its nature to be pictured to the mind. What, then, can be your reason for so coolly perverting the most undeniable facts ? “ Because it is an insult to the loyalty of our people, as well as to* their spirit, to suppose that they need the excitement of passionate invectives.” Is it to this mean excuse that you are forced to have recourse, in order to screen the cool jacobinical manner in which you pleaded the cause, and extenuated the character of Bonaparte ? If, to palliate the horrible crimes of such a man, if, to varnish over the black enormities, and to throw a shade

* Edinburgh Review.

over the excesses of Bonaparte, be the charitable spirit of forbearance, I trust I never shall be actuated by such a spirit. Callous and insensible must be that heart of stone, which does not burn with the liveliest abhorrence at the vices and baneful oppression of Bonaparte. But, can it ever be an insult to the feelings and loyalty of Britons to be reminded of the nature of the enemy against whom they are fighting?

In proportion as you have magnified the power, and glossed over the talents and character of the "French Emperor," (as you dignify him), in the same proportion you have decried, vilified, and traduced the reputation of his great and successful opponent.—Was this calumniation heard from you when Mr Pitt was alive? No. His stern and severe integrity, the awful dignity of his commanding virtues, silenced such base and libellous attacks. And, sir, it is unmanly, it is worse—it is ungenerous to defame the character of the dead, when you durst not even endeavour to taint with the foul breath of aspersion the brightness of his name while he was alive.

—“ Thirsted for the blood of his former associates in reform.” Is this language (language which the most venal and prostituted mercenary never ventured to employ) becoming the character of a gentleman? But I forbear to animadvert on your assertions. You have already been dragged before the public tribunal, and received the chastisement which so scurrilous an attack justly merited. The country, I hope, will not long tolerate such artful and black falsehoods against their noble upright Commoner. The behaviour of the electors of Somerset will teach you, that the liberal open minds of Britons will never endure such libels against the reputation of their Preserver. How, indeed, could you suppose, that the nation would suffer men like the Edinburgh Reviewers, of talent and ingenuity, indeed, but no more to be compared to Mr Pitt than the grasshopper to the lion, distinguished by no powers but those of writing and disputing, to rake up, with unhallowed hands, the ashes of the mighty dead, and defame the memory of that departed statesman, to whom we owe our existence as an independent kingdom.

Against Mr Pitt's great and able coadjutor you have as yet thrown out only a few illiberal insinuations. Has he not equally, with Mr Pitt, incurred the resentment of every jacobin and seditious vagabond in Europe? But since he, alas! is no more, the same virulent and malignant abuse will now be launched forth against him. Well might that venerable statesman boast, in the words of Cicero, "that no one for five and thirty years had been the enemy of his country, and the partizan of reform and revolution, who had not also been his personal and violent opponent." But when the jar and turmoil of faction shall have died away, the furious opposition to his measures will be regarded with abhorrence, perhaps with incredulity; posterity will revere, with gratitude and awe, that energy, wisdom, and patriotic zeal, with which, in conjunction with Mr Pitt, he rolled back the tide of revolutionary phrenzy far from our happy shores, and curbed the spirit of reform which threatened the total overthrow of our constitution.

Towards the conclusion of your paper you intimate your intention of renewing

the subject, until you rouse the people to assist you in your plans of purifying the state from venality and corruption, and pledge yourself not to shrink from the field. I feel confident that the strong hand of the law will check you in this career, and prevent the constitution from being libelled in so violent a manner. It is, indeed, impossible that such open and dangerous attempts to excite discontent and sedition should be left unnoticed. Nor am I less confident, that the sense and steadiness of the country will, with one voice, reprobate your unconstitutional and jacobinical principles.

If I could flatter myself, that in writing this letter I have contributed to expose your glaring inconsistency, as well as the destructive tendency of your opinions, I shall be fully rewarded. I have the honour to remain,

Your very Obedient Servant,

AN INDEPENDENT

ANTI-REFORMER.

